DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 362 CS 011 782

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TITLE Putting the Pieces Together: Whole Language and the Minority Developmental Student.
PUB DATE Dec 93
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Reading Forum (Sanibel Island, FL, December 11-13, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; *Developmental Studies Programs; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; Hispanic Americans; *Instructional Effectiveness; Reading Comprehension; Reading Materials; Reading Research; *Remedial Reading; Undergraduate Students; Vocabulary Development; *Whole Language Approach
IDENTIFIERS Aesthetic Reading

ABSTRACT

A study examined the effectiveness of using whole language strategies to increase the reading skills of minority developmental reading students. Subjects were students (mostly at-risk Hispanics) assigned to a higher-level or lower-level college reading course. The treatment period lasted 12 weeks. Classwork varied among the five classes and included instruction in reading strategies, oral and silent reading of text selections with follow-up comprehension and vocabulary activities, and oral and silent reading of novels with discussions and periodic tests. Students also engaged in various writing and vocabulary activities related to novels. All students were pretested and posttested. Results indicated that: (1) mean gain scores of the combined vocabulary and comprehension subtest scores in the lower level reading groups were larger for the treatment group where novels were used compared to the group that used a reading skills text and no novels; (2) similar gains were found with the higher level reading groups; (3) in the lower level reading groups, the highest mean gain score on the reading attitude measure was found in the group that read novels and worked reading lab materials; (4) the mean gain score in reading attitude was significantly higher in the group that read novels; and (5) the mean gain scores of the combined comprehension and vocabulary subtests showed no statistically significant difference among the groups. (Contains 11 references and four tables of data. A list of 13 student reading materials is attached.) (RS)

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Putting the Pieces Together: Whole Language and the Minority Developmental Student

A Paper Presented at the
American Reading Forum Conference
December 11-13, 1993
Sanibel Island, Fl

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CS011782

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Putting the Pieces Together: Whole Language and the Minority Developmental Student

Review of the Literature

There is a scarcity of literature on literacy at the college level, and even less on developmental reading, specifically. Since this study focused on using whole language strategies to increase the reading skills of the minority develomental reading student, literature relevant to whole language strategy and the developmental college student was considered.

Kenneth Goodman, often referred to as the "father" of whole language, stated that language is learned best and easiest when it is whole and in natural context (1986). Weaver (1990) emphasized that whole language is a philosophy, a belief system about the nature of learning, not a specific program or approach to teaching. These descriptions are representative of the intangible nature of whole language as it is presented in professional literature today. This ambiguity of the philosophy allows for a variety of implementations, any and all of which may be described as whole language: reading, speaking, writing, and/or listening; the study of whole words, whole sentences, whole paragraphs, whole selections, whole books, whole subject areas, and/or whole curricula; it may also involve whole persons.

Charles E. Heerman (1981) reviewed the literature regarding the role of the college reading program in student retention efforts. He found that studies seeking to verify reading achievement as a valid predictor of student success in college revealed a moderate relationship between reading achievement and persistence. Reading achievement affected different students at different times within their courses of study, but there was no indication of how the affect was achieved.

A study was conducted by James A. Swindling (1982) in a community college reading program in Dallas, Texas to assess the impact of remedial reading instruction on academic achievement of students with reading skill deficiencies.

Student records were monitored for two years to identify significant differences between groups in terms of average hours attempted, average hours completed, attrition, and grade point average. The study found that students reading at a ninth grade reading level attempted an average of 9.2 hours per semester, completed an average of 5.7 hours per semester, persisted at a rate of 58 percent, and had a GPA of 2.6.

An assessment of the effectiveness of remedial reading courses at San Antonio College by Charles B. Florio (1975) found the following: females tended to score higher on the posttest and earned significantly more grade points than did males; Mexican-American and non-Mexican-American surnamed students who needed and completed reading did not earn significantly more grade points than did similar students who needed but did not take reading; and those students who had ACT social studies scores of 15 or above earned significantly more grade points than those who had scores of below 15.

Mary F. Whitt (1980) analyzed the skill of comprehension within the developmental reading program in institutions of higher learning. The experimental group included 102 students, and received instruction based upon a comprehension emphasis approach. The control group totaled 102 students who received instruction based upon a skills approach with no emphasis on any particular skill. Findings revealed that in total reading both groups made significant gains; both groups also improved significantly in vocabulary skills. The experimental group, however, made significantly greater gains than the control group in the skill of comprehension.

Leatrice W. Emeruwa (1981) surveyed students at an urban community college in order to evaluate two developmental reading instructional models. One of these groups was taught in a tutorial setting; the other group was taught in a traditional classroom. Recommendations based on the data included: continuation of the mastery learning concept; developing a higher level developmental reading course; returning tutorial classes to the traditional classroom, but to support these

classes with a communications laboratory; and to maintain the developmental education program as a separate division.

Kulik, Kulik, and Shwalb (1983) performed a meta-analysis on college programs for disadvantaged and high risk students. Their findings indicated that special programs for these students had positive effects. They found a clear majority of the studies indicated that underprepared students who participted in the programs persisted longer and earned higher grades in regular college courses than did students who needed the programs but did not participate.

Affective influences have been found to be particularly important in working with the high risk student. According to Joan Hennessey (1990), a large number of researchers have reported a relationship between such variables as self-esteem and self-confidence, and academic achievement and persistence.

Reflecting on these findings from research on the college developmental student in general, and the college developmental reading student in particular, this experimental research study was designed. It included a literature-based component to enrich vocabulary learning and to motivate and encourage independent reading.

Procedure

Sample

The student population that makes up the developmental reading classes at this university is, for the most part, at-risk Hispanic students. The freshman class in the fall of 1993 included 1,123 students. Of these, 499 were male, 624 were female. There were 1035 Hispanics, 58 aliens, 28 whites, and one each of Indian and Asian ethnicity. Nine hundred eighty-four graduated from high school, 104 achieved the GED, and 35 entered on "individual approval". Of the 984 high school graduates, 773 graduated in 1993; 141 graduated between 1990-1992; 57, between 1980-1989; 10, between 1970-1979; and, three had an unknown graduation date.

Since this is an "open admissions" university, all students are assessed upon admission to the university; SAT and/or ACT test scores are not required. The

reading portion of this assessment is the *Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Form F* (1981). Students scoring below sixth grade level who are not proficient in English are assigned to classes in English as a Second Language. All students who are proficient in English scoring below eighth grade level are assigned to College Reading I. Students scoring between eighth and tenth grade levels are assigned to College Reading II. All students must pass the reading portion of the *Texas Academic Skills Program* (TASP) before they can exit developmental reading.

Six hundred forty seven (58%) of the students entering in the fall of 1993 were either not assessed, or were advised no reading class. Of those who were assessed, 37 (3%) were assigned to take English as a Second Language (found to be not proficient in English); 195 (17%) were assigned to College Reading I; 237 (21%) were assigned to College Reading II; 7 (less than 1%, who probably successfully passed the screening test for developmental reading, but did not pass the reading portion of the TASP) were assigned to College Reading III.

Materials

Materials used in College Reading I included Lenier and Maker's *College Reading I, Readers' Digest*, and two novels: *Sounder* and *Where the Lilies Bloom.* In the Reading Lab students used the *SRA Reading Lab IIIa, Six-Way Paragraphs*, and various activities requiring students to select main ideas from paragraphs. Reading materials used in the College Reading II classes included Smith's *Breaking Through*, Lenier and Maker's *Keys to a Powerful Vocabulary* , and five novels: *Where the Red Fern Grows, White Fang, Across Five Aprils, To Kill a Mockingbird,* and *Ten Little Indians.*

Testing

All students were pretested and posttested. Form A of Tests 1 (Reading Comprehension), 2 (Word Meaning), and 3 (Word Parts) of the *Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Blue Level* was administered and used as a pretest while Form B of Blue Level was used as a posttest. To determine if attitudes towards reading were affected, The *Adult Survey of Reading Attitudes* (ASRA) was also administered as a pre- and post test.

Treatment

Treatment period lasted for 12 weeks of the Spring 1992 semester with three hours of class time each week. Classwork varied among the groups; activities included: instruction on reading strategies, oral and silent reading of text selections with follow-up comprehension and vocabulary activities, and oral and silent reading of novels with discussions and periodic tests. Students also engaged in various writing and vocabulary activities related to their novels.

Group 1: A College Reading I class that used a reading textbook two hours per week and attended the Reading Lab one hour each week were also assigned to read *Reader's Digest*.

Group 2: A College Reading I class that attended the Reading Lab for a total of three hours a week and were also assigned to read two novels and *Reader's Digest*.

Group 3: A College Reading II class that used a reading textbook and were assigned to read five novels.

Group 4: A College Reading II class that used a vocabulary textbook were assigned to read five novels.

Group 5: A College Reading II class that used a reading textbook and a vocabulary textbook.

Discussion of Treatment

Both treatment groups of College Reading I classes read the *Readers' Digest* for out-of-class reading with some class discussion. Grades were not taken on any assignments related to that activity. Group 2 completed both novels. *Sounder* was read mostly in class with the teacher reading sections to the class and the students reading orally and silently with class discussions and a mixture of vocabulary and comprehension activities. It took about four weeks to complete the novel. *Where the Lilies Bloom* was all out-of-class reading with class discussions and a variety of vocabulary and comprehension activities in class over a four week-period.

In the Reading Lab all College Reading I students signed a contract with their instructor as to the various activities they were to accomplish. Activities included reading selections for building comprehension and vocabulary, and rate builders for building fluency in the *SRA Reading Lab IIIa*, selections in *Six-Way Paragraphs*, and selected main idea activities. Students worked independently, progressing at their own rates with periodic teacher consultation and monitoring.

The list of novels selected for the College Reading II classes was an ambitious one. The first novel read was *White Fang*. Students found this difficult reading and were unable to read this novel independently. Thus much class time was spent reading and discussing the story which took approximately six weeks to complete. The second novel, *Ten Little Indians*, was somewhat easier and more interesting to the students; they were able to read it with some help with British idioms. Reading of this novel took about three and a half to four weeks. The third

book, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, was by far the favorite, and students were able to read most of it independently with some class discussions. This took the remaining two weeks of the treatment period. Students took a test after completing each novel. *Across Five Aprils*, on the other hand, was assigned as independent reading, and time was not spent on in-class reading or discussions, nor was there a test over the book. It had also become apparent that *To Kill a Mockingbird* would be much too difficult for our students and was deleted from the reading list.

Results

The SPSS^{x} statistical package was used to analyze the data of this study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to provide an empirical base from which implications and conclusions were drawn.

A null hypothesis was considered at the onset of this study. That hypothesis was: There will be no significant difference in gain scores between the two treatments in teaching reading in College Reading I, and among the three treatments in teaching reading in College Reading II as measured by the *Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT),* Blue Level, Forms A and B and the *Adult Survey of Reading Attitudes* (ASRA). The first step to test this hypothesis was to perform a *t*-test using the gain score means taken from the combined vocabulary and comprehension scores of the SDRT, Blue Level, Forms A and B for each treatment. These tests were administered to the reading groups at the beginning and at the end of the semester (see Table 1). Also, the gain score means were determined from the results of the ASRA administered at the beginning and at the end of the same semester (see Table 2). Then, *t*-tests were performed using the gain score means

from the subtests of vocabulary and comprehension for each treatment for each treatment (see Tables 3-4).

TABLE 1: *t*-Test Gain Scores-SDRT				
GROUP	NUMBER	MEAN	SD	*p*
TOTAL	120	6.28	9.58	
College Reading I				
1	24	3.71	11.51	
2	9	4.22	9.24	0.536
College Reading II				
3	30	8.23	10.65	
4	35	7.14	8.51	0.209
4	35	7.14	8.51	
5	22	5.86	7.25	0.443
3	30	8.23	10.65	
5	22	5.86	7.25	0.072

TABLE 2: *t*-Test Gain Scores-ASRA				
GROUP	NUMBER	MEAN	SD	*p*
TOTAL	60	5.29	12.63	
College Reading I				
1	19	2.95	17.31	
2	6	4.83	7.25	0.063
College Reading II				
3	13	5.23	13.95	
4	17	8.59	4.32	0*
4	17	8.59	4.32	
5	5	7.4	12.26	0.002*
3	13	5.23	13.95	
5	5	7.4	12.26	0.872

TABLE 3: *t*-Test Gain Scores-SDRT: Comprehension				
GROUP	NUMBER	MEAN	SD	*p*
College Reading I				
1	24	1.92		
2	9	0	6.58	
College Reading II				
3	30	2.6	9.13	
4	35	3.09	5.72	0.009*
3	30	2.6	9.13	
5	22	3.23	4.58	0.002*
4	35	3.09	5.72	
5	22	3.23	4.58	0.286

TABLE 4: *t*-Test Gain Scores-SDRT: Vocabulary				
GROUP	NUMBER	MEAN	SD	*p*
College Reading I				
1	24	2.58	6.43	
2	9	2.11	7.8	0.441
College Reading II				
3	30	5.63	5.67	
4	35	4.06	6.05	0.729
3	30	5.63	5.67	
5	22	2.64	4.94	0.519
4	35	4.06	6.05	
5	22	2.64	4.94	0.519

When the vocabulary and comprehension subtest scores were combined the mean gain scores did not show any statistically significant difference between the different treatments used to teach reading. In addition, the treatments did not result in any significant change in reading attitude scores, with the exception of treatment groups 4 and 5 where the difference between gain scores was significant at the .05 level ($p = .002$) (see Table 2).

When the vocabulary and comprehension subtests scores of College Reading II groups were figured separately, the mean gain scores in comprehension were statistically significant between treatment groups 3 and 4, and 3 and 5. There was no statistical significance found in any of the treatment groups when the vocabulary gain scores were considered (see Tables 3 and 4).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that the mean gain scores of the combined vocabulary and comprehension subtest scores in the lower level reading groups appeared to be larger in the treatment group where novels were used along with reading lab materials (Group 2) in comparison to the group that used a reading skills text and read no novels (Group 1)(see Table 1). Similar findings were found with the higher level reading groups. The largest mean gain score of the combined vocabulary and comprehension subtest scores appeared in the group that used a reading skills textbook and also read five novels (Group 3), while the lowest mean gain score appeared in the group that used a reading skills textbook, a vocabulary textbook and read no novels (Group 5). When the subtest scores were separated, the greatest mean gain score in comprehension with the higher level reading groups

occurred in the treatment group where the reading and vocabulary textbooks were used; the greatest mean gain score in vocabulary occurred in the treatment group that used the textbook and five novels (see Table 3 and 4). Although not significant, the greatest mean gain score in comprehension in the lower level reading groups occurred in the group where the lab and textbook were used (Group 1).

The results from the ASRA indicate that in the lower level reading groups, the highest mean gain score was found in the group that read novels and worked reading lab materials (Group 2) as opposed to the other group that read no novels, used a reading skills textbook and worked reading lab materials (Group 1). Among the higher level reading groups, the mean gain score was higher for the treatment group using the vocabulary text and reading five novels (Group 4). The only significant difference between the mean gain scores among the treatment groups was found between the group that used the vocabulary textbook and read five novels and the group that used the reading skills textbook, the vocabulary textbook, and read no novels. In these last two groups the mean gain score was significantly higher in the group that read novels (see Table 2), suggesting that the reading of novels may affect the gain score in reading attitudes.

Summary and Implications

Due to the significant gain in mean scores of the Adult Survey of Reading Attitudes in Group 4 of College Reading II, we can assume that the students' attitudes became more favorable when they were involved in using a vocabulary textbook and read novels without using the reading textbook. In addition, due to the significant gain in mean scores of the comprehension subtest of the Stanford

Diagnostic Reading Tests in both Groups 4 and 5 of College Reading II, we can assume that the use of a vocabulary textbook may be responsible for improvement in comprehension achievement. Also, because there was no significant gain in the mean scores of the vocabulary subtest of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test in any of the groups, we can assume that no particular type of reading material nor type of instruction was responsible for improvement in vocabulary achievement.

Changes in curriculum design are not planned at this time. However, research will continue to further explore the philosophy of whole language in the college developmental reading program.

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